

### **LESSON 3H—NARRATIVE: WHO IS AN ARCHAEOLOGIST WHO STUDIES ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY?**

*Troy Helmick is an archaeologist who studies ancient technology.*

**T**roy Helmick is an archaeologist who studies ancient technology—the manufacture and use of material objects needed in daily life by people of the past. Troy grew up in central West Virginia, an area rich in historic and prehistoric sites. His interest in archaeology developed as he listened to his uncle tell Civil War stories and of finding “arrowheads” in cornfields. His fascination continued when he moved to Montana as a young adult. Troy then had the opportunity to discover Montana’s many archaeological sites and features.

Troy was curious to know more about ancient stone tools and weapons. He wanted to contribute correct information about lithics—objects made of stone by ancient people. He began flintknapping to understand the techniques and technology involved in creating those tools and weapons. He also studied the atlatl, a weapon used more than nine thousand years ago in North America. The atlatl is composed of a throwing board used to launch a long dart tipped with a projectile point. The atlatl was used until the bow and arrow replaced it as the preferred hunting weapon, about two thousand years ago.

Troy is an amateur archaeologist, working in the field out of personal interest rather than as a profession. He has made some important contributions with his experience. He has

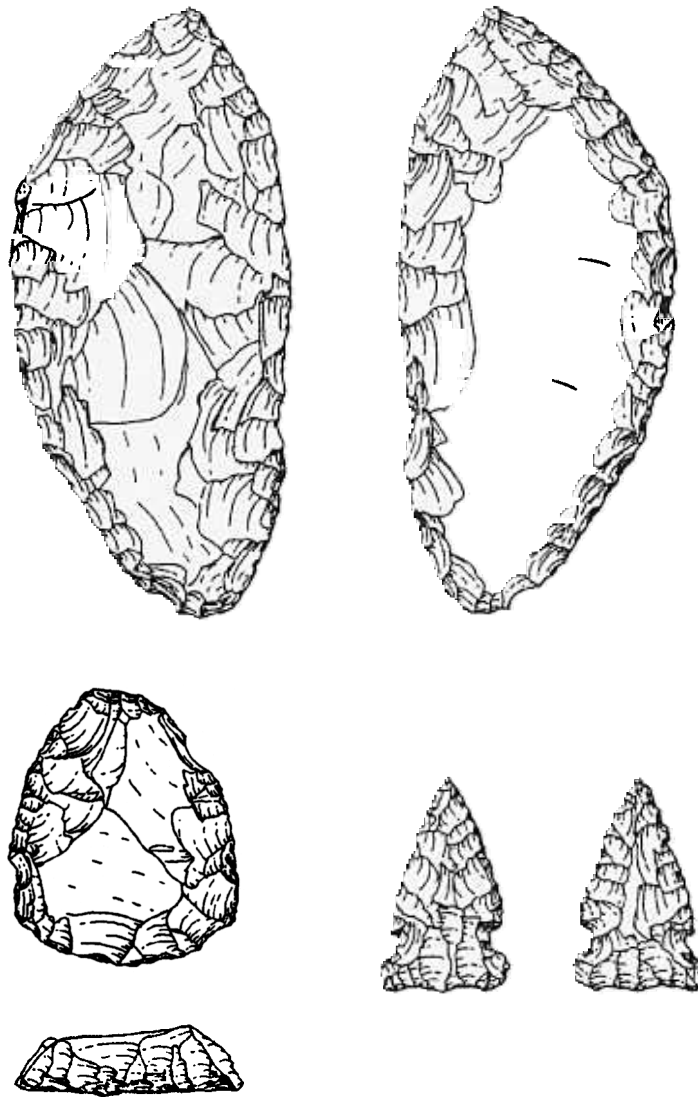
authored an article on atlatl weights found in Montana. These are stone artifacts and are the most commonly recovered pieces of an atlatl system besides the projectile point tips. Archaeologists have many ideas about the weight’s function. They test their theories by replicating the weapon and using it. No clear role of the weight has yet been determined. What archaeologists do know is that ancient atlatl hunters could effectively hit a target.

Archaeological interest in atlatls has led to competitions, both for research and fun. Troy participates in these atlatl competitions. He reports that the current world record distance for an atlatl-thrown dart is 258.6 meters!

Troy enjoys studying prehistoric archaeology because there are so many unanswered questions. It is very easy for him to stay interested in his search for answers. He says that the most difficult part of his work in archaeology is finding time to do everything he would like to accomplish.

Troy’s favorite location is Canyon Ferry Lake, near Helena. He has spent more than thirty years studying sites along the lakebed. More than four thousand artifacts from these sites have been catalogued. They represent ten thousand years of habitation! He feels that the importance of these finds is yet to be recognized and determined.

Troy Helmick draws scientific illustrations of artifacts for archaeologists. These detailed drawings help to show how an artifact was made. Here are three of Troy's drawings: a stone knife, an end-scraper, and a projectile point. *Courtesy Montana Historical Society.*



Troy has worked on many archaeological projects throughout Montana. He has done research for the Montana Historical Society Preservation Office, Helena, and worked on the Flying D Ranch Survey, Madison County. He has surveyed sites and worked as an archaeological aide for Dr. Leslie B. Davis of the Museum of the Rockies, Bozeman, and for Aaberg Cultural Research Consulting Service. The locations he has worked include Sheep Rock Springs, Steels Pass, Barton Gulch, Bowman Springs,

Lindsay Mammoth, Indian Creek, McHaffie, Dry Creek, KXGN, Bear Paw Springs, Merrel, and Mann Gulch.

Troy has carried out a variety of archaeological tasks working at those locations. He has located, identified, marked, and recorded artifacts, features, and sites. He has drafted cross-section and profile maps, as well as vicinity and location maps. Other work he has performed includes topographic surveys, horizontal and vertical grid layouts, sorting screened matrix to recover cultural materials,

and writing reports. In addition, he has drawn ink illustrations of stone and bone artifacts to include in site reports. His illustrations have appeared in numerous archaeology reports.

When Troy is not involved in archaeological activities, he spends time with his family. Troy and his wife, Shirley, live in Townsend, Montana. Their six children are Rhonda in West Virginia, Leslie Ann of Billings, Coleene living in Virginia, Charmon in nearby Helena, Brent in Naples, Italy, and Dean in California. Troy and Shirley have ten grandchildren! Hunting, fishing, photography, Lewis and Clark—and of course atlatl competitions and flintnapping—are among Troy's hobbies.

Students interested in archaeology may contact Troy at:

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Troy Helmick is a nationally recognized marksman in the use of the atlatl weapon system. Here he demonstrates the pieces of the atlatl to Ted Turner on the Flying D Ranch outside Bozeman, Montana. *Mark Baumlér, photographer. Courtesy Montana Historical Society.*